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HUMAN RIGHTS AND SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Written statement submitted by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[15 April 1997]

Human rights and bioethics

1. The Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) was invited in 1996 by the World Health Organization (WHO) to participate in the preparation of its Global Health Policy for the twenty-first century, in respect particularly of the ethical content of the policy. WHO will submit this policy and a Global Health Charter to the World Health Assembly in May 1998.

2. CIOMS formed an international Ethics Advisory Committee to assist in identifying and elaborating on the ethical implications of the Policy. The Committee met in September 1996 and drew up an agenda for a conference entitled "Ethics, Equity and the Renewal of WHO's Health-for-All Strategy", which was convened in Geneva on 12-14 March 1997, co-hosted by WHO and CIOMS. The outcome of the conference has been communicated to the Director-General of WHO.

3. One outcome of the conference was an action plan for a CIOMS-WHO Initiative on Ethics, Equity and Health for All. The plan draws attention to the fact that the Declaration of Almaty in 1978 identified equity, human

rights and social justice as essential elements for achieving health for all. The impediments to the pursuit of health for all have included violations of human rights. A global health policy centred on equity, including commitment to health as a human right, is necessary to the achievement of health for all.

4. Among a number of needs for action, the conference specified that knowledge and application of human rights instruments by health professionals should be refined and strengthened; that the extent and the causes of inequities in health should be studied, documented and constantly updated at global, national and local levels; that the promotion of equity and human rights in health policy and practice needs to be supported consistently by practical training in ethics and human rights in relation to health, at all stages of the education and training of all health workers; that administrators and faculty members of medical and nursing schools and schools of public health need training in the applications to health of ethics and human rights; and that the public be well informed about equity and human rights in relation to health and the exercise of responsibility in health protection.

5. Principles for action included priority to the involvement of countries and groups that are under-represented in ethics and human rights deliberations, with particular emphasis on the participation of women, and including victims of inequity in health and of abuse and neglect of human rights; and to undertake long-term efforts to incorporate ethical practice and respect for human rights in the applications of science and technology to health policy and practice.

6. The conference supported a proposal to organize an international forum to advance equity in global health as a particular application of ethics and human rights.

7. Suggested areas of action to ensure that ethics and human rights are integral to policy and action for global health included: 1. Clarify the concepts of ethics and human rights in health and institutionalize the capacity of ministries of health to operationalize them; 2. Develop means of designing and implementing an integrated mechanism for systematic vigilance of inequities in health and abuses or neglect of human rights; 3. With human rights groups, develop a means of ensuring that health policy makers, administrators, health workers and the public are fully and regularly informed of the content and implications for their work of human rights instruments; and 4. Prepare working definitions of such key terms as "ethics" "equity", "solidarity", and "human rights", to take account of international, intersectoral and cultural diversity.